

Interview with Don Gray

Interviewee: Don Gray

Camera operator: Cindy Samples

Interviewer: Bob

INT: Well Don, one of the things we wanted to do was to pick your brain about what you remember about the National Wildlife Refuge Association. And I know that we have a couple of questions here...specifically Ed Trotion was the one who contacted us about interviewing you. Ed was interested in some of the people who were involved early on in setting up the NWRA.

DON: Well, I've got a couple of pictures here of our board meetings and I'll try to remember...

INT: When was this picture taken?

DON: I don't have any idea.

INT: Probably in the early 80's? That other one you had 1980 on that one....so..looks like a lot of the same people here.

CINDY: We can make copies of these pictures

INT: And Don's got the names written on the back of the people who are in the picture.

CINDY: And that is the National Wildlife Refuge Association?

DON: Right.

INT: Can you just go around here Don, and uh..

DON: ...(inaudible)...I'm not sure who that is, and that I think is Mary Smith, and standing behind is Larry Feelings,and that is me, and my wife, she was treasurer...and I don't recall. And there is Mark Nelson.

INT: And you've got this other one labeled. This other picture looks like mostly the same folks.

Don: Yeah, it's the same, the same date.

INT: Where did they hold the early meetings Don? Do you remember?

Don: It started off in Forest Carpenter's house

INT: Oh really? In Minneapolis?

Don: Yeah, Yeah.

INT: Forest was the refuge supervisor while he was retired right?

Don: No, he wasn't retired.

INT: Oh, still working huh?

Don: Yes.

INT: OK. So you started meetings at his house, and then, did you have meetings around the country at all? or did you just pretty much focus...

Don: Well huh, we would have at least one board meeting a year, and that was centered in the twin cities.

INT: What were some of the participants concerns in terms of this organization...what was it going to do for the refuge system or...?

Don: Well we were concerned with the fact that, as of now,...(inaudible)...proper funding for background maintenance was set up. Also, we were really interested in a bureau of the National Wildlife Refuges. But the big issue was.... major adjustments in the country... And many personal problems, not any particular ones... And aspects of public views... And the review of regulations and laws. And I don't know if any other instances came up from the board members, a lot of them came up from personnel on the job.

INT: and these were, a lot of them were former refuge people, refuge managers, so they knew what some of the issues were, and some of the problems?

Don: Yeah. I think all of them.

INT: Frank Burtan, Wes Douglas...

Don: Wes Douglas was my assistant and Griffith...(in-audible) Larry Gibbons...

But they were all very much concerned about the future of the system particularly the tax made to take the refuges we were currently managing, or were then, and give them to, either soul or partial, management to other agencies, either federal state or local. What we were concerned about was the integrity of the National Wildlife Refuge Association And I think that we felt confident that our presence, it seemed had something to do with it.

INT: Made a difference?

Don: Made a difference.

INT: Well it sounds like those concerns you mentioned are still there of course. I guess another question was, you mentioned your wife was treasurer?

Don: Yeah.

INT: How did they decide on who was going to lead the group? Was there a someone who was nominated as a chairman?

Don: We had to...(in-audible)... ___ Was a refuge supervisor at a regional office. And we weren't initially accepted very adequately by the refuge system.

INT: They felt threatened maybe by the group you think?

Don: They didn't know just what they were going to do, we hadn't come out with a particular statement, you know. But later on, we came out with one. I don't have it here.

I was vice president, but like the vice president of the federal government, you do what you're told to do.

INT: By the number one guy huh?

Don: I was designated as the membership chairman. It was up to me to keep our membership up.

INT: So, Forest Parker was the president, you were the vice president and your wife was the treasurer...

Don: Well Wes Douglas Started out as the secretary and I think he handled the finances for the first year or so. Then he either had some health problems or wanted to get out from under that part of it. Then my wife was asked if she was interested in the treasurer job. Of course she said, "I don't know anything about it, what your plans are, how many dollars and so forth." But she took over the job of the treasurer and did a very good job of handling the funds, and dispensing and so forth. We didn't have any problems. It was a good situation for us; so many big organizations have problems with dollars disappearing. And she enjoyed it. She knew so many of the people involved.

INT: Don, I know we sent you a copy of that historical kind of record that Ed Froser had put together. Did you see anything in it that struck you? Any recollections that you had, not to put you on the spot, I know there is a lot of detail. Ed was just interested in knowing if you had anything to add?

Don: No, I think Ed covered it. Of course he knew a lot of background when I was not president. But because of Ed, that had to do with the prospering of the refuge association.

INT: Well and you're going to help fill in the blanks here with these photographs and these names of people who were with the Minneapolis group so that's going to be a big help.

Ed really put together a lot of information.

Don: Yeah he sure did. I was surprised that there was that much. I didn't get into it until after I was retired

INT: And you said that was '72?

Don: Yeah, that was March of '72

Int: And you were_____ when you were retired right?

Don: Yeah

Cindy: Do you remember what year you joined the organizations? Or when it started?

Don: I think my first membership card was dated 1975

INT: (to person off the camera) Can you think of anything else that we need to ask about NWRA?

OFF CAMERA: I'm curious, these pictures were taken maybe in the 80's you said?

Don: This one was. This one was dated April 1980

OFF CAMERA: Oh ok

INT: And it's almost the same people (as the other picture) the same group.

OFF CAMERA: So we know that these have to be at least after 1975 because you are in the picture.

Don: Oh yes. Right.

OFF CAMERA: OH OK That is what I was trying to get at.

Don: We met in Washington D.C. Area, and Denver, Colorado for our board meetings as well as mainly around in Bloomington Minnesota and the Twin Cities.

INT: I was trying to think, ...Don Reiley was the regional photographer, and he wouldn't have taken these would he have?

Don: No, no I don't think so. One of the fellows probably had a camera and had somebody take 'em.

INT: OK

Don: But I don't have any questions on Ed's write-up here, I think it's perfect. It really covers the background that I think is needed for an organization that we really hope is going to exist for a while.

INT: Well, maybe we can get into a little bit about your refuge career. I guess we thought we'd go back and start off with where'd you get your start? Where were you born? Where are you from?

Don: I was born and raised in Grand Rapids, Michigan and I went to local schools and then when I graduated from high school, I went to Michigan State College, now Michigan State University. I took a degree in Forestry. Graduated in 1932. When I came out, there weren't any jobs available, it was right in the middle of the depression. So I was lucky and I was on a list. I suppose because of forestry graduates, someone who had an end result that people might be interested in the ECW, or the CCC program. ECW was Emergency Conservation Works, and CCC of course is Civilian Conservation Corp. And so I was assigned to the Heron National Forest in Lower Michigan and reported for duty in May of 1933. I was assigned to the Glenney Camp of the CCC program, I think it was 661.

INT: Wow, you have a good memory

Don: Yeah, that of what I do remember. And uh, the district forester was a graduate from Michigan State that I had met while I was going to college. He was Lewie Herbert, he's

passed away I think since then. But while I was on the forest, I was mainly involved in game management activities, which was just starting out at that time. When Tripincy wrote up his big manual on wildlife management.

OFF CAMERA: Who wrote up....?

Don: It was Doctor Tripincy, I don't know whether he was from Wisconsin or where. And uh, so when they demised the CCC program in the late or middle '30s, as anticipated, an announcement came out for opening up for examinations of Refuge Manager of the Bureau of Biological Survey. And so I took the exam and was appointed as an Assistant Refuge Manager. I think it was P2 or something like that at that time. One was two thousand I think and two was twenty-six-hundred or something like that.

INT: That was salary?

Don: Salary

INT: That was big buck then

(Laughs)

Don: Not only that, but after we had been in the CCC program for a while we got an economy deduction and there was a ten-percent cut in our salary, and then after that there was a five-percent. So we were suffering in a fifteen-percent economy deduction. But thank heavens it didn't last, we got it back

INT: So you got the distinction of working for the department of Agriculture and the Department of Interior when they changed.

Don: Right

INT: I just wanted to go back a little and ask, what kind of projects did you work on the CCC camp? You did wildlife management things, were you habitat manipulation or....

Don: Right. Yeah, and sending of stands and of course just recently an article came up in the Audubon Magazine about the Curtler Warbler which is close to endangered and we had things there, but we didn't have any procedures that they covered there. We didn't have enough academic personnel behind this to give us basic information to start from. But there was timber stand improvement and then I was in charge of constructing a trout rearing pond and we worked with the Bureau of Fisheries up in Northville Michigan and raised about two-hundred-thousand trout each year. And it was all dug by hand by CCC programs. I had four raceways.

INT: Rainbow trout?

Don: Mainly brook trout. We had some good streams up there. It was near the Asobo (?) River and Heron runs near the Asobo (?) River. It is a big trout stream; it runs right through the forest. And so we did some trout tagging on the runs from Lake Heron into the Asobo (?) And I did a lot of work on trout stream improvement. I really enjoyed it. It

was fun, hot weather, standing in that cool water. But we could see the end of the CCC program coming, so I took the exam and passed it as an assistant refuge manager. That was interesting in the level of the manager position.

INT: Yeah, what refuge, Don?

Don: I was assigned to the Saint Marks National Wildlife Refuge

INT: Oh, in Florida

Don: In Florida, I moved there in October of 1938

INT: Hey, I just gotta ask you a question, did you ever get to meet Aldo Leopold?

Don: No, I never met him

INT: I was just wondering, when you were in the Midwest he was active in that time

Don: But there were several University officianados so to speak on wildlife from the University of Michigan who we worked with on census work.

INT: Pet n' Gill (?) wasn't he one of them?

Don: He was one of them, yep. I forget some of the others. That far back...I...

INT: I just thought you might of run into Leopold or heard him speak or something like that.

Don: Well, I worked quite a bit with the controlled burning with Herb Stodderd

INT: Oh, the one who did all the quail work?

Don: Yeah the one who did all the quail work. He was an interesting person and it was interesting to work on the controlled burns.

INT: So then you went to Saint Marks as the Assistant Manager?

Don: No, as The Manager

INT: Oh, as the Manager!

Don: Assistant Manager was just the title. There was no Assistant Manager. The Manager I replaced moved out.

INT: Oh, that's so they could pay you at Assistant Manager Scale, but you had to do manager work. That's the game. Was it at a complex or something?

Don: No, it was just the Refuge there at Saint Marks.

INT: What was the staff like at that time? Did you have a clerk or an admin person?

Don: There was no Clerk when I went there

INT: You did your own paper work huh?

Don: Yeah for a while, then I finally got authorization to hire a clerk, and a labor patrolman, and a Junior Forest Game Warden.

INT: A Junior Forest Game Warden (hahaha)

Don: Both of them about twelve hundred dollars a year. I tell ya, it was hard in those days to try to get funding for anything. Money was tight.

INT: And what year did you say you went there?

Don: 1938. It was October of 38 and I stayed there until I think it was October of 41 when I was asked to take over and start the Santine National Wildlife Refuge in South Carolina. So I went there and stayed until 1944 when I went into the Navy during the war.

INT: What'd you do in the Navy?

Don: I was an armed guard officer.

INT: Short patrol?

Don: No, I had a 26-man gun crew on a merchant ship. In other words, we were protection for the merchant ships. I was on a liberty ship. I remember it was quite interesting

INT: What part of the country were you in?

Don: All in the Pacific. I made two trips across the Pacific. One to the Philippines and Lukian (?) gulf. And one to the Ookanawa (?) eventually but we were in Lumithia (?) when Japan gave up. And then we finished our journey to Ookanawa (?) and unloaded what we had on board for an aerial bomb group.

When I got out of the Service.

OFF CAMERA: When would that have been?

Don: That was in 1945, no, I actually got out of the Navy, in 1946. In April of 1946 was my discharge.

I was asked to take the management of the Horikon (?) National Wildlife Refuge by Clark Salure.

INT: Was Harold Bushweiler there at that time? Or did you hire Harold?

Don: I hired Harold.

INT: I got to know Harold real well while I was at Horikon. He was a great guy.

Don: OH yeah

INT: One of the few male admin people I ever met. Well, we called them clerks then, but now a days its admin.

Don: Oh, administration

INT: Yeah, Harold told me when he was first starting out that he could do all his paper work in one day and he spent the other four days out on the refuge.

Don: Yeah, he always protested. He said, I can get that work done, let me get out there and work. Of course that was when we were working on building up our knowledge on goose management.

OFF CAMERA: Goose?

Don: Goose, yeah.

OFF CAMERA: And what was Harold's Last name?

INT: Bushweiler

Don: yeah, w-e-i-l-e-r I think

INT: Yeah, Harold's passed away, but he was a good guy to work with.

Don: And Les Douglas was my assistant. I think Les went from there to managing the Rice field (???) Refuge.

INT: So you were there in the days when the Canada Goose flock was building up at Horikon?

Don: OH yes. When I came there the maximum number ever there, was 3000. When I left, it was about 19 or 20 thousand. My first job was to put the signs up on the rest of the refuge that hadn't been posted. People were hunting practically the entire refuge because they didn't have any personnel during the war. It was managed by people from Seedee (??) National Wildlife Refuge. They'd come down about once every two or three months (laughs) see if it was still there. But Just before I left Horikon I had got started on the dike going across the marsh.

INT: How long were you are Horikon?

Don: Three years. And from there I went to the Lower Sourises (???) Refuge.

OFF CAMERA: The what?

Don: Lower Sourises, now J Clark Saler. In North Dakota.

INT: Speaking of J Clark Saler, was he your boss? You mentioned him when you were at Horikon.

Don: Well he was refuge chief in the National Wildlife Service.

INT: Who was the Saler you mentioned? Was that at Jim Saler?

Don: No...

INT: OH, I thought I heard you mention Saler.

Don: I did, Clark Saler

INT: Oh, J, Clark

Don: THE Clark Saler. He was quite a character. Really something below him. He was rough and tough. He didn't like to fly, and he had a big black Pontiac Sadan. And he traveled all over in that Sadan.

OFF CAMERA: Were you thinking of some body else Bob?

INT: Well I think that I picked up that Don said that Saler had told him something. And I thought that was strange that he would be getting instructions from the head guy in Washington.

Don: Well he was in Chicago when I came out of the Navy.

INT: Oh, he actually hired you?

Don: No, I was...

INT: Oh, you had reinstatement rights or whatever.

Don: Yeah. He asked me if I had any choice about going. And I thought well gee, he said, "I got the Horikon refuge open if you'd like to go there". And I said I would because it was close to my home in Grand Rapids where my parents were. And my wife's folks and our relatives. I was real happy to get there because it is a real interesting area.

OFF CAMERA: You mentioned he was in Chicago, was that an office?

Don: Well they moved the National Office from Washington to Chicago during the war.

Off CAMERA: OH

Don: They were in the merchandised mart...those offices were.

INT: Can you imagine? Wouldn't you like to be a fly on the wall when J. Clark Saler says to Don Gray, Don, would you like to be the manager at Horikon. (laughs) Man oh man, talk about a lot of history here.

So, from Horikon you went to Lower Souris.

Don: Yep. And stayed there for either and half years.

OFF CAMERA: Can you spell that for me?

Don: Souris? S-o-u-r-i-s. Lower, cause there is an upper Souris and a Lower Souris.

Frank Martin was the manager at Upper Souris

OFF CAMERA: And it was North Dakota?

Don: North Dakota. Yeah.

OFF CAMERA: And it's a National Wildlife Refuge?

Don: Right. A Very important one.

OFF CAMERA: Why is it important?

Don: Because it's a migration stop particularly with Blue and Snall Geese. Thousands and thousands of them up there. And the biggest problem we had was duck deprivation. Farmers would swath their grain and the ducks would get in there, the pintails and mallards and so forth by the thousands. In fact I went to the Lower Souris because the manager had been killed in an airplane accident when they were shagging the ducks out of a farmer's field.

INT: Who was that, Don, do you remember?

Don: Johnson, I think it was....I forget what his first name was.

OFF CAMERA: Can you help me out? Because I don't understand what happened to the ducks.

Don: Oh, well, on migration they would come through by the thousands. And the farmers had laid out their grain in the fields in the swath. They had what they called a swather and they cut the grain so it would lay down in lines for their harvesting machine, their

combines. The ducks would just drop in there by the thousands and eat and damage more grain than they ate. tramping and so forth.

OFF THE CAMERA: So what did the farmers do?

Don: They'd get madder than hell.

OFF CAMERA: Did they shoot them?

Don, no, it wouldn't do any good to shoot them because the only reason it would be is to scare them. We had carbine canons; we had delayed action hangrinades that we threw out of airplanes. (laughs) then we had...what do you call them? Firecrackers?...well anyway

INT: Cracker shells that you could put in a shot gun you mean?

Don: No, we had those too. But we had taken firecrackers and had a hemp rope and started out as the rope burned and it would get the fuse of the rope and it would go off

INT: A delayed explosion.

Don: Right yeah. So the farmers didn't have to sit out and shoot all the time.

OFF CAMERA: So that's what happened to the previous manager? He was out doing something like that?

Don: Yeah, he was out flying and he and the pilot were killed in a green field.

INT: Hazardous duty.

Don: Yeah, Bill Green did a lot of that too.

INT: Yeah, I know that they did that at Horikon too back in the 60's.

OFF CAMERA: We should do more of this, I learned a lot more. I need to hear this, because this was way before my time.

INT: Well then from Lower Souris did you come to Upper Minnis?

Don: Yeah That was just after Ray Steele died.

OFF CAMERA: Did Ray die while he was working?

Don: Well, yeah, he hadn't retired.

OFF CAMERA: Oh, I didn't realize that.

INT: What year was that that you came up to Minnis?

Don: 1958, March.

INT: Oh, so you were here for 14 year then. Were you still buying land up here on the river?

Don: Only very rarely would we do it. It would be mainly exchange.

INT: That was about the time that the closed areas were changed.

Don: yeah, 1957 they were adjusted. But it raised a lot of fury around here. The people didn't like the new lines.

INT: You had a good biologist working for you then didn't ya?

Don: Oh yeah, Bill Green was tops.

INT: We sure have relayed a lot on files and things that Bill did over the years. Not only at this refuge, but at Horikon and other places.

Don: Yeah, he was all over the region he was out at Nia Brera, and Sand hills.

INT: Taught the academy at Arden Hills. I missed out on that. I started out the year after the last Arden Hills Academy.

Don: Yeah, I was an instructor out there too.

INT: Oh, were you?

Don: Yeah, that was a real nice experience

INT: So then you came to Upper Miss and things got real exciting

Don: Well, I got the Mark Twain and the Upper Miss.

INT: Oh is that right? Mark Twain was under...

Don: Yeah, Mark Twain hadn't been established by then so I had to travel 500 miles down to the confluence of the Mississippi and the Illinois.

INT: At that time the corp. line...The co-op agreement haven't been negotiated yet then, so the corp. line wasn't in refuge was it when you first came?

Don: Yeah, oh yeah it was incorporated then. But I thought that one of our big jobs was to get closer, acquainted with the people in the Corp. And I spent a lot of time with their wildlife people. To try to get them to see what we were trying to do, particularly with soil disposal and things like that.

OFF CAMERA: When did Mark Twain get separated?

Don: EEH.....(long pause) Probably..... in the early 60's.

OFF CAMERA: Was this the place where you retired from? Upper Miss?

Don: Right!

INT: Don, you were here during the '65 flood.

Don: Right.

INT: That was the big one, the hundred-year flood. What do you remember about that?

Don: I remember in the office of the Tuplar Refuge...in a boat.

INT: I've seen some of the pictures...water up four feet on the side of buildings when the dykes broke.

Don: Yep.

INT: Harvey must have been running around like a chicken with his head of there huh?

Don: Yeah, Mike had his problems then. Well then other things we went through the big soybean oil spill from mwen mahn quado (???) that was kind of close to around the flood too I think. We spent a lot of time working on that.

INT: Now how did that affect Upper Miss? It got in the Minnesota River and then....

Don: And came down the Mississippi.

INT: It came all that way huh?

Don: Yep.

INT: What were the impacts of that?

Don: Well, it wasn't like the Alaskan spill or anything like that. But it was just birds being coated with oil was one thing. We didn't do much of that trying to clean up.

INT: Anything that stands out here about your time on the river Don? Things you were able to accomplish, or things you were frustrated with? (laughs) There were probably a number of those things.

Don: Well basically I had a good crew of district managers. Every one of them was tops. So my philosophy was to tell them that they should tell me what should be done. And I would try to put it all together and make my decisions on that basis, so we are all working together to try to accomplish what needed to be done. And we tried a lot of different things, of trying to put some duck field agricultural crops in the bottom some, but it didn't work out too well. It was so hard to get around, we didn't have the equipment, we didn't have the money to buy it and we were pretty short. And I spent a lot of time on the river, and the district managers too, on the recreational use that was really bergening them. And we had (inaudible). And I was just thinking back, there was an article in the paper just the other day about the river clean up and the big deal that they made about that. We started that way back when I was at Heron when we had not just the district area, but the whole refuge area and the conservation departments and county organizations.

INT: Everybody pitched in?

Don: Every body pitched in on one particular day. That was good, so. You mentioned Bart Foster, Bart was really good on working with the public use area. He devised a program that whenever they'd see a group of people on a beach where it looked like it was going to be a mess when they left, and if they noted that it wasn't, why, they'd take the number of the boat, and they'd write in and get the name and the address of the owner of the boat And Bart had devised a little postcard with a print of the Upper Mississippi Refuge on one side and a little notice on the backside that said "Congratulations, you have been given this hounds tooth award. On your leaving the area that you occupied as clean as a hounds tooth." (laughs) and that got quite a lot of fun out of that.

INT: I bet people appreciated that. I bet the word got around, it probably got competitive, we want one of those cards from Foster.

Don: huh?

INT: I said, people probably started hoping they were going to get one of those cards.

Don: Oh, yeah.

INT: Then did you have another card for the guy who didn't do such a good job, or he got a ticket?

Don: Yeah, he got a ticket.

INT: Well we're still doing some of that stuff down in....and as you know recreation has continued to bergen. On the river.

Don: Well I'm interested in knowing what your refuge policy is in regard to law enforcement. I understand that you really only have to have so much training to be in law. To do the normal things we did back then.

INT: The shift now, Don, is to go to fulltime officers. We still have the collateral duty, now they are calling in dual function. People who are assistant managers or refuge operational specialists are doing law enforcement as a collateral duty, but the trend seems to be to do to full time officers. Training requirements are getting more specific and more extensive and that seems to be a tendency. Now we have a fulltime refuge officer on each of the four districts on upper Miss, so now we have four fulltime officers.

Don: We spent hundreds of hours on bag checks and enforcements checks on landings when people came in from hunting and so forth. And a lot of time enforcing what regulations we had were regard to littering and so forth. So, I was lucky, I was put in and awarded...or granted a distinguished service award. Because of....partially on the basis of our work with regard to recreation and things like that.

INT: Did they give you that right before you retired, Don?

Don: Yeah. As far as I know I was the first, I got a letter from the Forest Service that indicated that I was the first working refuge manager who had received a distinguished service award.

INT: Well, good. Congratulations. I didn't know that. That is quite a prestigious award.

Don: It sure was.

INT: Well, sounds like it was well deserved.

Don: I sure enjoyed it.

INT: I guess we wanted to ask you just a few things about your personal....anything else on the refuge Cindy that we should cover? Or anything else, Don? that you want to....? You could probably go on for...(laughs).

OFF CAMERA: I'm just curious, were you involved in the wilderness study?

Don: It was just started when I left. It was probably started about a year before I left. The paperwork was just getting so bad, that I gave up.

INT: You mean paperwork in general? Or Just on the wilderness?

Don: Just in general.

INT: Well, that hasn't improved any

Don: And the wilderness was the cream... uh... of the frosting.

INT: Don, you mentioned that you had been married for 70 years. Where did you get married?

Don: Grand Rapids, Michigan.

INT: ...And as far as children?

Don: I had 5 children, 2 girls and 3 boys. My oldest daughter passed away two years ago, serious illness.

INT: OH, sorry to hear that.

Don: And the rest of them are scattered all over the country. My other daughter is in New Hampshire and her husband was in the second spot in the reality office, the Boston regional office. A Real sharp one. And he was 50, he had just retired, and in a year, he had died with a massive brain aneurism. And left her with ten kids.

And then my youngest son was an employee of the service at the sign shop.

INT: I wanted to ask you, did you supervise the sign shop? When you were the manager there?

Don: Yep, I started it.

INT: You started the sign shop? In 60.what was it? No....58 with when you came here.

Don: I came in 58, but I didn't start it right away. It was part of the recreational thing, you know, getting the publicity and so forth you know.

INT: Was there a maintenance facility there at that time?

Don: What was that at the celtistry?

INT: Yeah, that was a maintenance shop and then the sign shop came later huh?

Don: Yeah, see it was maintenance and warehousing, the main part was warehousing at that time. So, I started that up and then a good man Bill Chald, did you ever meet Bill?

INT: Yep.

Don: OH, he was tops. He took over and made a real thing with it. And my youngest son, that's where he spent his time in the sign shop. And then my son transferred to the bureau of prisons justice department. He retired a few years ago.

INT: What kind of hobbies...were you a hunting and fishing kind of guy?

Don: No, I came up with a parent that didn't have any interest in hunting or fishing or recreation or anything. In fact we didn't even have a car until I was a sophomore in high school.

INT: Well then what got you going in the conservation mode?

Don: Well, one summer in high school I used to work trimming trees for the forestry department in Grand Rapids. The city forester was Ed Ekard, he was a great guy, I admired him very much. He kind of talked me into going into forestry and I thought I might go into municipal forestry. But when I came out of school, the municipalities weren't hiring foresters; they were just hiring someone who could pull a saw or load brush or something like that.

INT: How did your career affect your family? You made a lot of moves over the years.

Don: Oh, they did fine. My wife was a beauty for putting up with the moves...about every three years practically.

INT: In fact, back in those days there was mostly government housing on a lot of the refuges wasn't there?

Don: We had housing at St. Marks, but none at Santee, and none at Horikon and we had refuge housing at Lower Souris. But they went out of the business pretty much.

INT: Yeah, there was a de-fences on refuge housing and now there're leaning back in that direction again.

Don: Well I noticed the manager at St. Marks lives in Tallahassee, that's 25 to 30 miles. The manager of Lower Souris, Clark Saller, lives in Botul, which is 20, 25 miles and they maintain the headquarters where it always was. But yeah, they've changed a lot there. I guess they figure they've spent too much money maybe in Maintenance and upkeep.

INT: What are your thoughts about that? About refuge quarters? About having the manager living on the refuge versus living in town?

Don: Well, I always enjoyed living on the refuge. It gave me a feeling of recognition as opposed to living on some street in a city or something like that, a distance from the area. I like to keep my fingers on the pulse of the way the refuge operates. So, I like the idea, but so much different opinions among the people being hired and people who are on the job.

INT: You think of anything else? I guess we're kind of winding down, Don, You've certainly given us a lot of history. I know I've learned a lot. And I know that Ed is going to be interested in these photographs and some of the comments you've already made. I think this is kind of a neat idea, getting this thing recorded.

Don: Oh, I do too.

INT: Because you've obviously got a lot of history and make this available for some of the younger people. To know some of the things that went on before.

It's hard to have a perspective. It always amazed me when I look at old area photographs of the refuge and a place that I'm familiar with, and I think, Wow, you mean it actually used to look like that?

Don: Well, you know when I came here, practically the main operations of the refuge was post and patrol. That's pretty much all we did because we didn't have any money or enough people, and we didn't have enough money to hire people and things like that so they were out in the field most of the time. Then we started getting into so many other things

INT: But those things are still important. In fact, maybe even more important because we've got so many neighbors now. And so many potential encroachments from people who live along the refuge boundary. So even though we seem like we take on new programs all the time. We still can't turn our backs on those basic responsibilities that we have.

Don: No. Boathouses in the back sloughs and fences across refuge lands and people keeping the refuge people off the refuge lands. All the way up and down before these resident complexes exist that they just more or less take over and it's like it's part of their property.

INT: Part of their yard, yeah. That strip of shoreline becomes part of their front yard.

Don: I had to remove, or I had to have a district manager remove two pretty nice cottages down to the Savannah district once. Because they were on the ground and policy was no habitation. So, that didn't set very well with a lot of people.

INT: No.

Well Don, thanks a lot for doing this, we really appreciate it. We'll pass along this information.

Don: Yeah.

INT: Cindy? What were your plans for this tape?

CINDY: What we'll do is sent it to our National Conservation Training Center. And then what they'll do is listen to it and they write a whole transcript of the questions and the answers. And then it's in their library because they have a whole program on trying to get these interviews. I think you did one before.

Don: Yeah.

Cindy: There's never a lack of information that we get from you. I should have been in on that last interview so I could have learned. And I think I'll make copies of these photos and send with that, so that the names are attached.

Don: If you want to keep them you can, as far as I'm concerned to keep in the file.

Cindy: Ok, Well we sure appreciate you coming in. And what a great day, a beautiful day out there. And we're stuck in here. WE should be out on the refuge, posting and patrolling.

Don: I'm glad to do it.

INT: We've got computers now, Don. How did you manage to manage the refuge without computers?

Don: You should have seen Bill Green typing the cards and then using a thing to go through and sake out the cards that didn't have holes in them.

Cindy: Oh, was that his computer? Those early....

Don: Yeah.

INT: That was state of the art technology at that time, right?

Cindy: You know it's pretty impressive to me that somebody also who served in the Navy.

Don: yeah. You know one thing you people could do a better job is keeping the former employees a little bit more aware of what's going on. Because I don't hear anything from anybody.

INT: You're not on our list for CCP stuff?

Don: OH, yeah I get that. But, if some particular problem comes up or something like that, if you are able to, to contact somebody for some background on it.

Cindy: Did you get a copy of our refuge journal?

Don: Yeah. I was going to give you a list of my three boys, but I didn't bring it with me. I should have brought it with me.

Cindy: To send them the information as well?

Don: Yeah.

My two girls were born when I was with the forest service. And my boys were born when I was with the Fish and Wildlife Service. And particularly the boys are all interested in it. My youngest son, Terry is retired and lives down at Money Creek. 20 miles south of here. But it's nice to, no matter what kind of information it is, but whenever you have something special going on, it's nice to know. I don't get around much anymore because my wife is not in the best health and I'm having my problems too.

INT: Now, how old are you?

Don: 93

INT: Well, you look pretty good for 93.

Cindy: and how old were you when you retired?

Don: I retired in 1972 that would be 61.

INT: I'm going to be retiring at the same age. I'm 61 and I'm gonna be retiring here in November so, I hope I look as good as you at 93 if I make it that long.

Cindy: It's interesting because you worked at Horikon too Bob, right?

INT: Yeah, I was there from 76 to 80. I worked with Harold, Harold Bushwieler and he talked about you, Don. Andy Patchen was the maintenance man, I don't know was Andy there?

Don: No

INT: Oh, he must have come later.

Don: Bill Leery was, did you ever meet Bill?

INT: No.

Don: Well I have to tell ya this, Wild Goose Marsh, did you ever see the book?

INT: The book? Yeah.

Don: Neither Bill Leery, who was one of the most important guys on the Horikon Marsh, and me, are not mentioned in that book.

INT: They screwed up on that one.

Don: Well, I think it was deliberate. Not me, but Bill Leery was a colorful character.

They accused me of hiring the biggest outlaw as the maintenance man. But man, he could talk to those people. He was German like they were.

INT: Oh that was a big help, when you had all those angry farmers.

Cindy: Well thank you very much.

Don: Well I enjoy being invited.